“Devotion”

The heart can think of no devotion
Greater than being shore to ocean -
Holding the curve of one position,
Counting an endless repetition.

-Robert Frost
**House of Poetry Program**

**Wednesday, March 25, 2015**

On the campus of Baylor University, Waco, Texas

All events are in the Armstrong-Browning Library

(Follow the link for directions; enter at the portico of the Cox Entrance Foyer off James Street)

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<td>Registration and Coffee Reception—Cox Reception Hall</td>
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<td>9:15 a.m.</td>
<td>Welcome: Department of English, Baylor University</td>
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<td>9:30-10:30</td>
<td>Readings from &quot;The House of Poetry&quot; Volume XXVII</td>
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<td>11:00-12:00</td>
<td>Guest Presenter: Alan Birkelbach, “The Monks of Tuva”</td>
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<td>Noon-1:00 p.m.</td>
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<td>Open Floor Readings, Closing Remarks</td>
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*Alan Berecka* earns his keep as a reference librarian at Del Mar College in Corpus Christi. His poetry has appeared in such periodicals as the *American Literary Review, The Christian Century* and *The Texas Review* and anthologies such as *St Peter’s B-List* (Ava Maria Press). Three collections of his poetry have been published, the latest of which is *With Our Baggage* by Lamar University Press, 2013. His second book, *Remembering the Body*, was a finalist for the Eric Hoffer Award. Known for an irreverent wit, he is a frequent presenter of his work at festivals and events and has read in such far flung places as Vilnius, Lithuania, and Santa Fe, New Mexico.

*Alan Birkelbach*, a native Texan, was the 2005 Poet Laureate of Texas. His work has appeared in such journals and anthologies as *Grasslands Review, Borderlands, The Langdon Review, and Concho River Review*. He has received a Fellowship Grant from the Writer’s League of Texas, was nominated for Wrangler, Spur, and Pushcart Prizes, and is a member of both the Texas Institute of Letters and The Academy of American Poets. He has been a featured reader at the Texas Book Festival twice. His tenth book, *Meridienne Verte*, is scheduled for summer 2015.
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*The House of Poetry 2015*

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Linda Banks

**Bringing In the Sheets**

I understand the symbolism now, of course, but I sang the song long before I ever saw a field of wheat, and even longer before I watched Amish farmers gather armloads of the pale stalks and stack them in sheaves, as others did before the age of automation. Still, when I sing the song I land feet first in the backyard of my childhood, wrangling bucking white rectangles from the clothesline. When they were tamed and harnessed to scratchy striped-ticking mattresses their wind-dried, sun-pressed fragrance would nuzzle us to sleep.

I know the right words of that old hymn, but I prefer singing it the way I did then. Not only does it take me back in time, but it centers me as I count my blessings: fresh air, clean sheets, daily bread…

Windhover, January 2007, Volume 11
Linda Banks

From a Distance

Down a country road
somewhere between
two small towns
a field
gleaned and turned
waited
for another season.

Day after day,
nothing much happened.

Until
early one morning
a new crop sprouted
spreading white blooms
across tilled expanse.

Even on a still day
it seemed a breeze
tossed flowers
this way and that
from one spot
to another.

When
the entire bunch
lifted up
like a bride’s bouquet
it scattered
across the sky
blossoms
winging
out of sight.

Texas Poetry Calendar, 2015
Cassy Burleson

Because I Saw a Couple Dancing  (Revised 3/15/15)

I’m back to my beginner’s mind again, reaching out to touch you with these thoughts. But I’m not perfect yet. I hope that doesn’t disappoint you, my perfectly solid You.
In fact, today I kept a rosary of all my faults, and I’m not even Catholic,
Focused on my bumps and warts, no priest to protect me from my mis-thoughts.
No confession to keep away the cold of truth. Baptists blame no one but themselves.
But just last night, we were heart to heart in one smooth wrapper, foiled in a Chocolate kiss of touch and tongue. Faith somewhere in a rear view mirror offering grace once and twice again.

And I so trusted you at first touch … Outlandishly Witty, Charming, Enjoyable You. Even though I told myself I would not ... could not ... should not ... I did, anyway, Because my fear of abandonment occasionally overtakes my enchantment with Constant isolation ... You might say my fear makes me covertly brave, occasionally. And that's the yen and yang of it. I should have been much stronger 20 years ago. (More brave, back then. Maybe I should have been Chinese or some wiser, Older Soul, Somewhere in the soup mix of my past … I'm such a pop philosopher these days.)

I might have been Chinese in one time or another, but never strong enough Before, and it's this life we're discussing now. Besides, tonight a full moon blazes, That moon a rising sweet gardenia against an azure sky of urgent hope. Dreams rising past Leo. On such a night, I'm always back to my Beginner's Mind again. Back to being the Novice, None the smarter yet, perhaps, and in some ways, hiding in my habits, Safe and comfortable in all my expectations, nevertheless, my resolution is simple: Never trapped again or limited for long inside that bell jar of insulation or deception of belief.

Yet I was content with smothering for some time in my pasts and still don’t fully understand that. Disbelief kept tapping at the glass, waiting for me to lift the edge for Air. But now the wind is on My neck. And although I'm old enough, and scared and scarred enough to have lost all hope in St. Nicholas, the Easter Bunny, and the Tooth Fairy, I still believe in us. I confess that and the fact You were and have been my only Muse. I still believe in you ... although I miss my safety net of Doubt. Risking’s risky, Even though I sometimes smile my cynic's smile -- and swear I don't Believe in risk or St. Nicholas, the Easter Bunny or the Tooth Fairy. I still believe in Leprechauns.

And I’m also still stuck in wouldn't, won't, couldn't, shouldn't, mustn't, mightn't … ought not to. And sometimes, I've been either wrong or right or rowing single long enough to wonder if only a Fool believes again. But then I catch your glance and know I’m right when I believe in you and us. So let’s be two old fools with faith, two old fools who sail like projected Mustard seeds, striking out against the current and the tide. amorists always, Braving tornados and floods just to get to the other side ... Just because it's … still there. That pot of the gold at the end of hard times, disbelief and failure …
Even though we set out across our blank deserts with blistered feet and cracked lips, Canteens full of brown water and wilted flowers, with only garbage sacks for covers, Vowing to be brave just once more ... tallying the odds, betting against pain one more time – bankrupt gamblers – Lucky streaks aside and Going West—defying time and Laughing like lightening while folding on full houses ... but still intensely casual about it all. Saying, “Don’t bet against us, honey .... Don’t get too cocky-- unless you feel like losing.” You may think it’s false bravado. It is not. We are better together and brave beyond ourselves.”

Because we’re back to our beginner's minds again, baptized by emerald green lagoons, purified by Summer suns, imbued with a dandelion's quiet white and fragile strength, sailing out across fields And through forests like Rip Van Winkle –
Born again and waking up like Christmas morning. Shrugging off sleep and bursting forth on Higher Power through streams of tears and tinsel, sand catching our skin and buffing off the Calluses as we roll smooth as newborn lambs into bright blue eyes again and Settling ever so gently earth-wise on fresh-plowed ground.

We are renewed, skipping out to meet our destiny. So we will dig down deeply and rejoice – Risking winter, flood, faded dreams and famine, we will burrow gladly down Into deep dark cover in each other once again ... just to see what pleasures wait beneath the sod – Two long-lost lovers, loving till the last and all the better for it – Back again and laughing as we toy, and rightly so, with our beginners’ minds again. Whatever is, Was, and should be, and is again. For I am home with you and you in me.

And this little Southern Belle has a steel shell and beautiful markings, and tiny eyes that see Everything gladly. Even though my itchy, strong little feet keep saying I can walk away any time I want to. Which makes me want to stay. But these little feet go both ways, honey. So although I'm Back to my beginner's mind again, my heart is wise and gray and wrinkled but is connected by a Silver thread to you. So although my little ladybug legs work just fine, and although I have the Glorious exit down to an art form ... achievable in nanoseconds of thought ... I plan to stay Entwined in us forever and ever, amen.

Even though in my car, I can get away fast. In a plane, stand back and watch my dust ’Cause I Know all about the geographic cure. So give me your best shot. Yes, I'm just beginner at this Unconditional love stuff, but I'll try to keep up. See? I even brought my own sparklers. So let’s get Out your prime-time firecrackers ’cause I could be a Roman candle right now. I could be God's Own angel parked right here on top of your tree. So just sit there and watch me shine, 'cause I'm Planning on having happy new years for the rest our lives. You are my Zen from A to Z-Z-Zs.
And I am back to my beginner's mind again because I am home in you and you in me …

And all because I saw couple dancing, and it was us becoming us again.
Cassy Burleson

The Wedding (Revised 3/13/15)

Let this be a warning to you, poet and painter of automobiles,
This family is a crazy quilt of colors generations have worn:
Administrator, accountant, or adjuster,
Airplane pilot, architect, artist or attorney,
Blueprint reader, cattleman or cattle woman,
Carpenter, college president, computer nerd, or
Episcopalian priest, estimator, farmer, financial analyst or homemaker,
Indian and Indian fighter, insurance salesmen, or jailhouse birds – it doesn’t matter.

Whether journalist, lettuce-shed workers, librarian, lobbyist, manager, or military men,
Ministers, musicians, paupers – or prosperous prophets,
Race-car drivers, researchers, respiratory therapists, roustabouts or secretaries ... give us our
Illiterate soothsayers, teachers, waitresses, world-travelers or wayward homebound souls –
Some pretentious, some proud, and some “Married Well-Off” – we’ve all found our haven here.
And this messy medium is your legacy. Your medley, your melange,
Until death do us part, for better or worse –
(At least for those of us who still believe in better times, death and politics).

But let this be a warning to you: In this magical melting pot – this event we call a wedding –
(An American kaleidoscope of immense costs and capitalistic inspiration)
Hope rests eternal. Hope is the melody we sing – sometimes in unison –
And in that, we are all born again, for better or worse, all believing better times,
Not worse. So send the Word to every street corner and every field –
To every church, big-city alley and every country-cousin country lane,
Sing the tunes our grandparents sang with all those gone before –
Whether our notes were nine months or nine lifetimes in the making.

We’re here for you. For richer. For poorer.
’Til death do us part. For better – or worse. You can count on that.
And so each June, July, or August, December, September or January,
We find our way through the noise of Life, despite the labyrinth of day-to-day woes.
And every once in a while – to the surprise of us all –
A painted bunting is born, that iridescent bird of turquoise and lime green joyful noise.
And in that sweet moment, there is more love in this crazy quilt called “family”
Than any heart that’s still alone could count.
This Spring

This Spring is claw-hammer ripping
The moldy plywood shutters off
The dirty windows of my soul
Tearing the drywall screws

Right out of the dry-rot 2x4’s
Of my termite-scurrying
Funk

Sunshower downpour thunderstorm
Rainwater
Washing the burning grey ash
Out of my cry-swollen eyes

Yes, this Spring is almost too much!
Never saw the surfer-green leaves
Explode from oxidized grey aluminum tree limbs
Explode! in green-world wonder

This awesome green spring overload
Alleluia!

Mockingbird jamming with nest-building robin
Play hard at daybreak
I cannot sleep
Like the two of you just finished
A bottle of Jack after jamming all night
And now first ray sunshine groove

The stuff is coming together
Solstice / equinox groove
Blowing trumpet-hard Coltrane
And smiling sunrise eyes sparkle!
All of Spring, a hymn – and nature
And Life – a doxology
Of irrepressible, un-surpress-able praise
Of universe creation shouting!

Those rocks DO cry out as
You enter Dallas,
Sandal-feet
Dance
And song
With hands held high
And eye Heaven-bound!
Dallas Philharmonic and
Hendrix lead
Splashed with Monet
And crazy Pollack paint spill all over me, and bright!

All green living amazement
And a new song in my heart
It is joy!
Playing a lead through
Glowing Fender (amp) tubes!

Thermo nuclear flower popping
Out of black cones of death
Crashing color, like a load of
Bluebonnet cymbals fell off
God’s gig truck
And hit the Dallas roadside
Spilled paint onto your oil-stained,
Concrete arteries and damn
Construction sites that always make me late;

I do not care
I have green blue sunshine air
And windows open Bossa Nova
Brazilian music in my / eyes and nose
Say Amen!

Your city blues cannot find me today
Oh, God and Springtime have smiled upon me
Showing me her beautiful teeth,
Water eyes full-lake sparkling sincere
Like blue mercury
In the sun

Spring, this year
I’m kissing you
With wild honey lips
In the pungent rainy woods

I cannot contain you, or take you all in
But I’m giving you my all
I’m showing up with my dancing shoes on
Making the altar call
In my Heart
This water-balloon Spring is bursting on my head
Baptizing me at the altar
and all I can say is
Alleluia and damn!

With tears mixing streaming
With sunshine raindrops
You have overflowed the river bank
With your grace and mercy

You have emptied my living-room
Of river water and mud
And filled it with pungent white Bartlett pear blossoms
And breakfast cooking

And the smell of coffee in her hair

I’m a purple crocus pushing up through the snow
Saying adios to winter,
And hello to
Springtime in Dallas!
C. W. Christian

**The Minstrels**

Where have all the minstrels gone
Who sang when I was young,
So young I believed that rainbows were real,
Like the rocks and trees around us?
Where have all the minstrels gone?
We welcomed them as they came over the hill
In their colorful tights and their piebald jackets
And their lutes inlaid with rosewood and ivory.
They had bells on their caps and their sandals
And their songs were warm and full of laughter.
They weren’t afraid to be foolish
And they weren’t afraid to be tender
And to sing of honest lovers
Who did not change when the west wind turned
And the north wind blew through the valleys.
Where have all the minstrels gone?
There are singers of songs
But their eyes are hard
And their songs are hard
And the children who follow are wrinkled and old,
And the children know, O, they know
That lovers love only ‘til daybreak
And that rainbows are mere refractions.
Weltschmertz

Let the sky sheep come and swath the moon in shadows
And we will huddle in its coolness
As if we were not heavy with spent hours,
As if the blood of youth still flamed our hopes,
And the passion of our days had not been squandered
On going and coming and being there
And nurturing and rising and sleeping,
And laughing aloud and sobbing.
Your cheek was smooth as polished stones,
Warm like apricot-fruit at dewbreak.
I remember.
Arcturus long since has left the sky
And Vega blinks in gray morning mists.
Venus shimmers dimly in the eastern dawn
And weary we are of waking
And caring and loving, and long to sleep.
Cardinal on the Snow

My boots broke through,
Then sank unto their boot-tops in the snow
On that bright Christmas morning.
The storm had passed us by
And left to us an incandescence,
Crisp, frigid and breathless
With not a leaf astir.
A cardinal, in his brisk ecclesial red
Dropped down upon the snow
To harvest some small tidbit he had spied,
Then back into the naked maple tree,
And then—mirabile dictu—began to sing.
Ten degrees of Fahrenheit around
And he began to sing!
As if he thought the sun-flecks on the ground
That danced and wavered with a passing breeze
Were jonquils pushing through the crusted snow.
Disdainful of the distant equinox,
His April message echoed through the trees
On Christmas morning: “Cheer, cheer, cheer!”
I found the carol spinning in my head:
“. . . and heaven, and heaven and nature sing.”
Clutches of Winter

The icy tentacled octopi reach to cover all they touch. Tenaciously they cling, until the approaching ball of fire overhead wins. All the covered is again revealed. Glistening droplets in rainbow hues fall. baring what lies hidden

For a time white wins over all other colors Objects below are held in unified Obeisance. Glittering particles, no two alike, cling by the millions to create a soft and rounded blanket over seasonal scenes around the world.

The previous sharpened edge between day and night becomes a blur of hazy twilight. Eire colors mark the scene, until the snow retreats.

It is hard to believe that both looks are in essence- the very same place. Nature takes hold of the paintbrush. The canvas is easily redone. Equally hard to believe-she has no deliberate plan for each creation. Such distinctive beauty abounds and surrounds. Then ... is Gone.
Kaleidoscopic thoughts filter
through the hourglass as we ride the box cars.
You
On the singing rails of life's adventure.
ever
  able to see just what is waiting around the next
curve.

Hold onto your stamina
  intuition
    courage
and sense of adventure.
Sway with delight as each curve exhibits
  new winds of pressure.
Tighten your hold onto life as it tries to slip
away.
The newness of today is old tomorrow.
Twilight Reflection

Unannounced
Those private episodes
one cannot quite recall
when recovering from the dream world.

Vivid sensations always so real-
people, objects, feelings
Floating past,
but always out of reach.

You know you are
and were there.
Exactly where
You cannot tell.

Who took you there
or made you stay?
Reality closes the bridge
to that other world.

Awake and aware seeps into your veins.
You must face the new day.
Dreamers beware-
you can never return!
Reflections in a Pool

Once as a boy,
I saw my face in the sky
on the water
of the pool
on the floor
of the canyon.

I wondered then,
how many others
in all of time,
found their reflections
in that water hole
cut by nature in the solid rock.

I imagined a girl
with stringy black hair
and dark, slightly Asian eyes
who carried a yucca mat
like I found one summer
in a shallow cave nearby.

She checked left and right
quickly as if for danger
as she bent into the image,
then stopped at the glimpse of her face
to touch her cheek and smile,
just as I had done.
Lee Elsesser

**One Texas Summer Moon**

On a long ago frontier,
when moon and sun and fire
gave this land its only light,
from where the Colorado River springs
to far below the Rio Bravo,
brightest nights brought darkest hours.
For when the Texas moons rose full,
hoof beats pounded dirt to dust
and terror rode the moonlight.
All along the timeworn trace
women wept and children cried,
cowards fled and heroes died
when in whatever tongue they spoke
they called the moon Comanche.
Reunion

Air conditioners cool the hall
where they assemble. They who
wear the accumulation of years
as a heavy mantle no longer
favor park pavilions
and July heat
and fighting flies off black-eyed peas
and okra.

Histories meet again. Bored children
endure long hours of hugs and sugar-coated interest
in cousins' offspring's offspring.

But he, the remnant of another time,
sits smiling. His manner
laced with respectful reserve,
he turns his crinkled face and
half-closed eye toward his slightly less
ancient, more talkative kin.

"Yes," he chuckles and nods as
his distant cousin regales him with
stories of days gone by--
family stories about long lines
of Bills and Aggies turning light bulbs.
The old man sits upright, fully suited
in dark, summer-weight wool,
speaking so softly his cousin
leans forward to hear.

Young men pass by. Feebly he reaches out
to them, hand extended, courtly.
"Thanks for inviting me," he says.

They pause briefly. A handshake, a nod, a hurried
grin.
The Phoenix

A dying ember, broken briquette
are all that's left, are what remain
of what was once a lovely fire.

The flame is gone in ashes gray
and there is not a warm, red coal
to mark the place where once it burned.

Such passion should be banked inside
and not so lightly easily thrown
to that uncaring wind and rain.

For, God, how mighty is this fire
to leave the hills and valleys black
charred toothpick trees and emptiness.

To brand the soul with hot memory and pain,
a few lines upon a once white page
writ in ash-black like tracks of smoke.

But pain and searing flesh are not
too much to pay for such an hour
of blazing glory like this fire.

It burns like sunset on the sky;
it fills the clouds; it scars the hand
of anyone who dares create.

It crashes, tumbles, falls, and breaks;
it burns; it pains; it smashes, wakes;
it sings; it showers; it sears; it lives.

Such power should not be so cheap,
so carelessly, so lightly thrown,
so little held, so loosely kept.

Such beauty should not be so free,
so quickly given, lightly spent
to vanish in the wind and rain.
Mathematics

The numbers find the sense to this untidy, sense-free universe—obscurring in their clarity.

We have not found the reasons for the gospels that ourselves create, the sense, the rhythm that we find

In Mathematics, reason's lord. Man's most nearly perfect art, queen of science, slave divine,

The siren's call that beckons us, that stimulates our overwhelming urge to trespass in the forest of infinity.

We couldn't know what ogres here awaited us, what ogres and delights among the terrible knowledge trees.

Exploring is Man's chosen task; none ordered it save him. We seek compulsively to know and understand.

And all our creations spring from this: the urge to count, form, measure, separate; the need to name the rhythms of eternity.

The galaxy journeys on through space, and when its final judgment's spake what can we say but man did this:

Created mathematics pure, perfected rhythm, Eros freed, with grace fulfilled, with beauty twined;

Created Mathematics clear to subdivide the universe and measured out and ordered time.
The Tolerance of Trees

In the woods behind our house I learn by observing. At first only one cedar flaunted year-long greenness to taunt deciduous oaks, but the cedar found a way to procreate, now counts a dozen off-spring. Ten sprang up in the backwoods, one beside the house, and one show-off whose beauty rivals the front-yard fountain, provides green glory near water. At woods edge, we buried iris rhizomes; the delicate wonders encourage the cedars, inspire the oaks. In quiet times I consider disparate species, question how native oak (post and black jack,) cedar, coral berry and elm find indulgence to welcome not only foreign rhizomes but nandina, pyracantha and yaupon that landscaping cedar wax wings and cultivating cardinals introduced to the mix. Maybe, in the chain of evolution, plants are at a stage beyond humans, mastering the most difficult task of tolerance. They use even themselves to teach us as they provide sacrifice for shelter, environment, even our bonfires. In our backwoods the lessons abound while inside our home the clock of our learning continues to tick.

Published in A Galaxy of Verse, Spring/Summer 2014.
Vigo Park, 1937

In 1937, Vigo Park’s parsonage did not have running water. Edna carried water from the outside well to the stove, heated it for baths, but Charlie wanted a shower. He rigged a crudely constructed stall, ran a hose from the well pump, then waited for darkness where no passerby could see pastoral nakedness through partial walls. His anticipation of well-water cleanness marked his mind with happy thoughts as he primed the pump, then raced to his stall.

At night, Panhandle sounds are numerous, varied like rainbow colors, but the loudest blue in the bow erupted that night in Vigo Park when unwarmed well water splashed Charlie’s body with a flood of near ice. He howled, grabbed his towel, hurried to Edna for welcome warmth to make it through what had become a nippy Panhandle night.

Published in *Texas Poetry Calendar, 2014*. 
Edgar Watkins, Cheese Head
(A Spoon River Poem in Rhyme)

My name was Edgar; I read cheese;
friends and I were seers of leaves,
then moved to Wisconsin and found
the cheese to watch, both square and round.
Tyromancy is what it's called,
I thought it strange, became enthralled.
The art is ancient, old and couth;
the cheese predicts tomorrow's truth.
You look for color, is it deep?
With golden cheese you smile asleep
because it means good years for you:
your clan will feed on honeydew.
Coagulation speed gives signs;
slow jells are good; quick shivers spines.
I loved the modern world most times
but I still liked old paradigms,
and seeing futures rang my bell.
It helped us all when I could tell
how our days would be tomorrow,
full of joy or maybe sorrow.
I thought that I would write a letter,
explaining Gouda, Brie and Cheddar,
but when I sliced them up for study
my dagger slipped and made me bloody.
Buried with sixteen pounds of Brie,
I met my death quite cheesefully.

Published in A Book of the Year, 2013, Poetry Society of Texas.
Sandi Horton

**Weeping**

'Weeping before coffee' read the poet this powerful verb caught my attention - weeping is not the same as crying Jesus wept when his friend Lazarus died

The poet continues reading his poem taking out the morning trash eyeing the pit bull next door not communicating with his neighbor

The poem ends, I am confused I ask the poet why he was weeping he states simply that his daughter had died the one year anniversary was approaching

Every morning he awakes with weeping my soul is instantly touched by love and grief shared by a fellow poet this is why we write - to communicate

**One Legged Sandpiper**

The tiny sandpiper hops on one leg her friends fly away as she hops alone

I don't see a health clinic for sea birds who need relief from a busted leg

The next day the one legged sandpiper is in the same place on the beach

She's hopping on the sand, all alone I don't know how to help her

A few days later I spy a washed up bird carcass with no feathers
Sandi Horton

**Dharma Dogs**

Tibetan bowl ringing
time for meditation
the dogs assemble
on their human's lap

breathe in....breathe out.....
time to relax
to contemplate life
forgiveness and enlightenment

calmness reigns
transformation begins
dharma dogs start to snore
deep peace feels the air

insight, compassion,
cherishing each other
are gifts given by
dharma dogs
Catherine L’Herisson

A Softer Shade

Like the red soil
that stains my white socks,
refuses to wash out
no matter how many times
I wash them,
your memory remains.
Oh, not as bright a hue
as at the beginning--
over time, little by little,
it fades, until it becomes
a softer shade
I can live with.

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Vol. 34 No.1 Spring/Summer 2014
Catherine L’Herisson

**Mother’s Day Gift**

Like a not-too-hungry little caterpillar,  
she munches dark green leaves,  
picking up each raw spinach leaf  
by the stem, methodically chewing  
one side at a time, stripping the middle vein  
before moving on to the next leaf.  
She is not filled with desire for spinach,  
but for dessert, which can only come  
after her mother’s command  
to eat something healthy.  
How healthy the honey mustard dressing  
that she dips each leaf in,  
and that drips like nectar  
from the corners of her mouth is,  
I can’t say.  
Her mother, my first-born,  
says it leans heavy on the honey side.  
She does not have to clean her plate,  
as I did as a child,  
or, as my second-born points out,  
I made them do.  
She still gets her ice cream.  
In fact, we buy two fancy flavors  
on the way back to my daughter’s home  
to open my gifts.  
But I have received gift enough,  
watching her eat,  
remembering when the nurses  
offered jello, pudding, cake, cookies—  
anything she wanted, including ice cream,  
and she could eat nothing after chemo.

Published in *Encore* by the National  
Federation of State Poetry Societies, Inc. 2006  
First place Missouri State Poetry Society Award

Reprinted in *A Galaxy of Verse* Vol. 31, No. 2
Catherine L’Herisson

**Photo on the Internet**

It is not their faces, but rather
their backs that face the camera lens.
The man is standing, shoulders slumped,
head tilted forward as if he is looking down.
The woman is bent down, squatting,
arm outstretched, reaching for something.
There are flattened buildings,
crumpled cars, rubble, destruction
all around them in this photo.

I wonder what the woman has found,
if it is maybe a family photograph
or prized possession from her home.
I pause, stop to read the caption.
It says she is not reaching for something,
but for someone, is stroking the hair
of their daughter they have just found,
found dead after the tsunami.

I can not see their faces,
the emotions registered on them,
the tears that must be flowing,
the pain and grief they must feel.
I can only express the compassion
I experience after seeing this photo,
identifying with this couple,
parents, who, after searching,
have found that they have lost a daughter.
Does it matter that I do not know them,
that I am American, and they are Japanese?

First place, published in *A Book of the Year 2012*
between the Poetry Society of Texas
Cibola – The Seven Cities of Gold

- Conquistador Francisco Vazquez de Coronado arrived at Cibola in 1540, discovering that stories told to him by a friar were lies. The cities of gold were only adobe pueblos.

It is understandable.
A traveler in those lands,
looking east, a low sun
reflecting off the surfaces
similar to Mesa Verde
might think they saw a city of gold.
Now
sun floods the courtyards in the afternoon,
broken buildings soak up the warmth to
fight the frigid air that creeps in at night.
History is buried here, in dark corners,
along with the bones of ancestors.
Abandoned now, for many suns and moons,
a place where tourists walk, crawl, and climb
through time slipped away.
While mysteries still linger to be unveiled.

Previously published in Merging Visions, “Collections IV” (2014)
Disagreement

I told her the worm was a butterfly.
She cocked her head, closed one blue eye.
In disbelief she voiced concern to me;
my five year old daughter . . . did not agree.

I had spoken words she refused to buy.
Looking certain she spoke with a sigh,
“Dad that thing wriggles and I saw it squirm,
that gooey green, slimy thing . . . it’s a worm!”

I told her soon it would take to the sky
on black and gold wings to flutter and fly.
After another sincere look and pause;
“Sure Dad . . . And I believe in Santa Claus!”

Once a swan started as an ugly duck
the same could happen to the worm with luck.
She listened, and then offered me these things,
“The duck started out . . . with feathers and wings.”

We checked the worm each afternoon;
watched it wrap itself in a spun cocoon.
I smiled in wonder, as young eyes grew bright
when beauty emerged, spread wings, and took flight.
I remember Saturdays when we would go downtown to the picture show, the matinee our destination. We would fill young minds and excite imagination. A fun filled afternoon watching news reels and cartoons, Roy and Gene and Lash Larue, or an uplifting war movie like, “To Hell and Back,” with a real Texas hero. The grimace and shudder as the first taste of a sour pickle hit taste buds, a big box of gooey milk duds and all of this for not much more than a dime. The pleasures found in a simpler time.
Anne McCrady

**New Man**  
*For Terrance Hayes*

Bitten by your kisses,  
ever a fickle lover  
with a thing for new men,  
I have added *Muscular Music*  
to my collection of seductive  
poets whose breathing sends me  
into swoon and sweat.

Reading, then wanting you  
close, I slip you in between  
other darlings, alphabetized  
collections I dip into at night,  
just after Donald Hall’s *Bed*  
and before young Seamus Heaney,  
musty, just in from the bog.

The three of you, talking about what?  
Southern women walking alone  
on the road in the rain?  
Donald’s wife, Jane, luminescent  
in death as in her lettered life?  
Heaney’s hearty memories  
of Irish peat farmers?

Eyes heavy, as I dim the lamp,  
your muscular voices whispering  
me into the first strophes of sleep,  
I keep a jealous ear cocked  
toward the bedroom bookshelf,  
my heart awake, hoping one of you  
might mention my name.
A cold rain wilts
fallen slips of leaf and stem
laid down by a recent north blow,
the preview to this slow Saturday.
Standing at the window, bone-chilled
from the draft flowing down the glass,
I tremble like the empty limbs of our maples
whose roots know to take sweetness from Earth
to make what we all want most: warmth.
Overhead in an old water oak,
a pileated woodpecker jack-hammers,
hollows out her chosen hole,
already imagines the nestling inside.
Two horses doze inside their shed.
Coons have scrambled into attic entries.

Hugging myself for comfort,
my skin and soul feel damp
with the insistent drip and drizzle
of missing the crisp days of spring.
I consider my stale list of unfinished business,
shiver toward the temptation of complaint—
then stop, picture the dry-eyed farm woman
who went for water every winter day
of her work-splintered childhood,
an adopted grandmother who,
as I now recall and reclaim,
taught me that cold is nothing
more than the absence
of my own warmth.
Because deaf ears don’t listen
Eyes with blindfolds
When asked to open
Look up in the sky
Closed minds
Have rusty locks
And the dead
Don’t change
Is no reason
To put down the trumpet
Or
Look the other way

Previously Published in “Second Shadow on the Wall” 2014
Masood Parvaze

Post Cards

Cobble stone streets
Grapevines…
Woven into; stone walls
Rocky shores
Smell of coffee
And
Old men…
Drinking wine
From short…dull…glasses, playing chess in the street
Makes me
…buy
Post cards
Which
I will never send
Tribal Phenomenon

Under my skin . . . are buried . . . many tribes
Clan . . . religion . . . language . . . nationality
Earliest human instincts for security
Still entrenched in caveman’s psyche
Some wrapped in silk
Placed on high pedestals
Some suspended upside down
Other . . . just dormant volcanoes seeping steam
Plumes of smoke . . . their flags of existence
. . .
These ancient tribes
Have shadows with unending echoes
They should have screamed
Not to follow them for ever
Or beg me
Look for fresh dirt . . . everyday
To bury them deeper
That Moment

It's the unexpected in life that is so fascinating . . .
A late Autumn week end retreat in the hill country near Austin
lives among my moments to remember

We rolled out of our bunk beds for morning coffee and sweet rolls
a good mix for getting acquainted
in a rugged pristine part of the planet new to us

Then above fun food and conversation this directive came
"Take five . . . in silence . . . and write a haiku"

Embarrassed to admit my ignorance
especially since teaching English was my first career
I whisper to a friend
"What's a haiku?"

An image of a seventeen syllable Japanese nature poem then
leads to a perfect path winding among ten thousand shades of yellow
endlessly cascading from giant Spanish oak trees
speaking their own mystical magical language of nature

"Leaves of gold
where is your path taking me
Dare I even guess? No . . .
Only see its heaven-ness"

Then Spring arrives and with it plans for an exhibit a solo exhibit
It seems to say "Something more - something more is needed
Who knows - and one never knows -
this may be your last hurrah"

Remembering past shows visitors asked
"What is this piece - this painting or sculpture - what does it mean?"
So now instead of explaining why not write
something that reflects my feeling about it

That haiku moment
becomes a point of no return
as a poem finds its place
with each visual piece shown
Simple thoughts  simple words  a simple place in time
meet to make a simple haiku . . .
becoming an aha! moment
perhaps an epiphany . . .

A moment appearing so unexpectedly
on a solitary path . . .
leading to a fascinating never ending
journey of grace

Alchemy

A dozen golden roses
Pure distilled sunlight
reflecting their source
Contradictions

In the early morning hours of a mid-winter day
A small but muscular figure darts past
a grove of live oaks
To the edge of the deep cobalt blue water
of Eagle Mountain Lake

Taking off his orange socks and sneakers
tossing his well-worn cap t-shirt
and shorts to the wind
The rippling of waves is the only sound
that December moment
as Randy takes his glorious daily swim

“Wow! What a morning for a swim!”
His words echo across the waves as
they herald an exercise of pure joy
in his dream

In the past early morning hours were spent
planning his day at the Bank
half an hour into town

More than once he startled his staff
by leading them to the trunk of his car
Gleefully showing off two possum passengers
visiting his patio now caged
later in the day to find a new home on
remote Eagle Mountain

Small of stature
but larger than life
this lover of life
still touches us with his passion for living

The fountain that bubbled within him
has grown dry
to echo across the waves of our hearts
Naomi Stroud Simmons

**Love Sonnets of Pablo Neruda**

I spent the closing of day with Neruda, 
swam headfirst into his whirl of words, 
a profusion of dips into the springs 
of sonnets, deeper still into pools 
where underwater swirled in lyrical magic.

This magic, swept by a leaping stream, 
poured me where white waters of his river 
emptied to his ocean of fleeing waves, 
deserted moss covered stones.

I followed his trail past the aroma 
of deepened woods with muted 
bird calls from untranslatable shadows 
leading to his Edenic garden,

a place to be drunk on towering pines 
and long kisses. There, with his pen, 
he opened the center of the universe, 
pushed aside the mysteries of emeralds, 
recounted creation of day, of night 
with the moon anchored between 
his mountains on the shore of evening.

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By a blue moon’s light I danced

with you past the door, down to the beach
to search the dunes for Captain Bly or forty
pirates with eye patches, bandanas

rolled and tied with salty knots,
their scabbards thrust in shore to stake
claim to the cache of night.

In proper time, we watched as sodden sea
horses arrived, galloping through wind-bent oats,
whinnying the stars awake.

en Pointe we crossed a clue
of turtle tracks trailing to their nest, disappearing.
The moon soon joined our hunt spotlighting

incoming waves rehearsing a grand entrance,
bringing their own audience, crabs
sidling from the teasing crest,

starfish gazing at their nakedness.
Tiring of our steps to outrun the tide
we climbed a dune, settled in the loge

as the proscenium offered its ancient chant,
drum rolls, zithers of spray,
wind-winnied instruments tuned

to the nocturnal chorus.
Under its spell
we joined the pulse of night,

the beat of waves
in ancient dance
until the cast bowed out,

dropped the curtain of night,
abandoned the stage.
We applauded, begged,

Encore! Encore!
just as we heard Sirius bay.

Published PST BOOK OF THE YEAR 2014
As Waves Crash

as waves crash against the rocky shore
I throw myself against you
to soften your rough edges
fit myself in your craggy spaces,
wrap my life with yours

at times gently caressing you.
other times, in full fury, with all the powers
I can summon from King Triton, Poseidon,
all the sea dragons of lore,
I crash, flooding your shore,
beating my fists
against you to break you
to make you be with me
never understanding
you are stone
and I am sea
Quiet Paradise

South Florida friends
post pictures
in bathing suits
for Winter Holidays.
I did the same when we lived there,
yet, there is comfort
donning a warm coat,
seeing my breath
as I say, "Happy New Year."
Kisses seem warmer;
wine more soothing.
Camaraderie of friends
with poetry and music
more endearing.
Rich foods
eaten with enthusiasm
against the chill.
The dark of winter,
a sincere time for reflecting
where I've been,
where I'm going
and how I got here.
They have yuletide suntans,
I have quiet paradise.
W.G. Beall

My father built our house upon a faith foundation. He was not famous but well-known in certain circles and respected. With hard work, determination and dedication, he went to college, proud of the black and scarlet colors of his University. He knew education was no ivory tower, but a path to help others, earn a living, be a better person. From a time when men were too proud to admit the burden of poverty, he went hungry while sending money home so his sister could have piano lessons. He hitchhiked with strangers to come home when he could. He would neither give nor accept sympathy, and with a personality akin to barbed wire once he had set his feet, he had no gift of persuasion. He just did what ever he needed to do - no permission asked - and scoffed at consequences. He was slow to anger and quick to make decisions. He kept far from flattery, and could not be conned. Plus, he frankly didn’t care about other’s opinions. Always wary of flowery language, even his casket held no flowers - only the pinecones from his land, pine boughs and gold ribbon.
And The Beat Goes On

Exercise-why do I have to exercise?
Surely I’ve done enough for my size;
I walk from room to room and I surmise
I’m doing plenty to be healthy and wise.
And the beat goes on.
But tests reveal another surprise
That I need more help under the guise
Of walking, pushing, lifting—and my prize.
Knowing I’ll be around to enjoy all my ties.
And the beat goes on.
When I get discouraged and want to say my good-byes,
I think of the importance of the how and the whys.
So when I grow weary, I’ll reach for the skies;
Then you can say, “Well, at least she tries.”
And the beat goes on.
And the beat goes on.
Were You There?

We all sat waiting, rows and rows,
To listen to stories, poems and prose
About the reasons for honoring those
Who had endured so many woes.
A young girl sang about all, in repose
Who gave their lives because they chose
To serve their country against our foes.
Why the small table, for the soldier I suppose;
Table draped with white tablecloth, bud vase with red rose;
Salt for the tears, sliced lemon for the blows,
An empty chair for POWs-MIAs; their fate, nobody knows
The upturned glass, lighted candle, bible with holy prose;
Then we stood for a song for all the fellows,
Who fought and died for all our tomorrows.
It was then the soldier slowly arose,
To show his love for country still shows.
He stood on one leg of flesh and bone, the other a steel rod that glowed
In the morning sun, a reminder of his many sorrows.
I tried to speak to him, but hated to impose,
Only silence and tears transcended at the close.
His face was still bold, proud, strong, not morose;
The colors were retired, then the trumpeter blows
The sound of Taps; remember how it goes?
I was honored to stand next to the veteran; we were so close.
Only one question I need to pose,
Were you there to honor our beloved heroes?
Sharon Taylor

**Ouachita Country**

We took it from them
beautiful Ouachita country
of inky mountains
and crimson sky.

We trampled on spirits
in sacred places
and laid pavement
over holy ground.

We disgraced their
great chief
and all his people
by forcing them to
live in foreign lands.

We built a lodge,
named it Queen Wilhelmina,
a playground for royalty
who never came.

We sip hot cider
in hard oak rockers,
porched in rows
along the view.
We used their language
to name the mountains,
but that is all to speak of
Native Americans.
Only English is spoken now.
The Moment

A shattered piece of an old fruit jar
half buried itself into the earth
and I, taking a late afternoon walk
through the woods,
stumbled upon it.
In this particular area,
the trees are not giving.
In their race to catch the sun
they umbrella the forest.
But on this afternoon
A persistent stray of light
penetrated their woven limbs,
and at that very moment
struck the fractured glass
with a brilliance.
I stopped.
I pondered.
In the midst of the muted wood
I found a gem, a fleeting gem.
Recognizing wealth in the moment,
I penned it to memory for others
To see.
To feel.
The Parting Smirk

It’s not the words you didn’t say;
It’s how you smiled and walked away
That changed the love grown in my soul,
From what I gave to what you stole.

The Widow and the Widower
(A Saturday Morning in Spring)

“What on earth were you thinking?”
He did his best to look sheepish.

“We’re supposed to be dusting the song books!”
His lips curled into a smile, but it was his eyes that laughed.

She shook, but not from anger,
Though his silence was infuriating.

Silence.
Silence.

“You’re old enough to know better!” She tried to scold.
It didn’t work.

“And, (she paused for emphasis) we’re in the Church!”
His eyebrows rose as if to say, “So?”

“And I’m old enough to have stopped you.” She confessed, but quietly.

Then,
He stepped forward and kissed her again.
Unprotected Life
(Uneducated and first pregnant at fourteen)

She was belly deep in babies,

With another one on the way.

She knew how to make water gravy,

But wished she had learned to pray,

For times like these were hard ones,

There was no money, just things to buy,

And she was hard pressed for any answers,

When her children began to cry.

And when her man got liquored up
And talked love with his whiskey breath,

She endured and silently wondered,

If freedom only came with death.
Thom Woodruff

Breaths

winter breath
solid air

exhausts follow cars
like gray dogs

rain drums
fill

naked tree
clothes the grass

on my fence (red cardinal)
today is a bird

pain reminds me-
this Bodhi!

Buddha reminds me-
Homeless!

just one Fall
Eden

waiting for tomatoes to ripen
i turned green

the sound of water
fills your emptied glass

raining world
sweeps the wind outdoors

empty moon
drunk on a blue sky.

Rock drops into silence
SPLASH!
I Knew a Man Who Gave Away All He Had--

his arms, his legs, his ears, his head
he said that Nothingness was his true nature
which left him with precisely that

i knew a woman who slept near mountains
she said solidity gave her strength
i asked her if a mining company stripped those mountains
would she sleep next to their machinery?

another wanted to live by the sea-
Fine!-until wind and waves blew away real estate
eroded beaches and drowned hopes afloat

still more live with their doors open
to welcome strangers into their homes
which were soon stripped to simplicity
(Burglars are Buddhists, too!)

more want to get away to a Mythical Country
Shangri-La beyond all City Limits
until houses become suburbs become villages
become towns become cities. Leave again..

where you are is not who you are/though Feng Shui
aligns with powers greater than all of us. We are part mountain,
sea, river, village, cave, hotel, community. A moving experience...
Memorable Speech of Ghosts

Now aflame with hot tongue and art
with a paddle for a brain and a star for a chart
i decipher a different morning to my ancients’ eyes
Break cobwebs and anchors on concrete lays
Tin tunes in thin times, drunk days in bars passed
Sifting smoke to find that fire red and hot
for politics divides, while love will rut
Coffee company, dream boat solitary
fishing for white whales and black swans
Missed sheets of myths fill my stone soup
Tales rattle like the wind police @ my door
I am in love with all there is. And i want more.
Patrick Allen Wright

Milking

In only my underwear
I get out of bed
slowly for my brother
and shuffle to the kitchen
rubbing my eyes
to watch my father
begin the day for us.
I take seventy-two
giant steps to the barn
to see if Ella is ready.
She is, and looks to be
almost bursting
when Dad turns on the light
to bathe her teats.
I fill her trough with
a coffee-can-full of grain.
I stroke her hornless head,
watching the muscles
in her jaw,
touching them
to feel her strength.
I touch her lashes
and make her wink.
Her milk rings
into the stainless pail.
Then, I fill her crib
with three squares of hay
and run back out
to watch the white foam rise
to the top of the pail
with each squeeze
of Dad’s hands.
Dad milks a muffled stream
until her bag hangs flaccid.
I follow Dad to the house,
wondering that he never
spills a drop.
In the kitchen he sets
the filter
and pours the milk
into a wide-mouthed jug
that we use
so we can skim the cream.
Passing Acquaintance

On a late summer afternoon
a fifty-one year old man
dies an unexpected death.
His friends gather
at his home the next day
to console each other,
and tears come
from the least expected
of mourners.
The stillness of aftershock
silences others.
Hinges sing
on the angry backdoor,
and a hole in the screen
allows flies to enter
that abode.
The circle is broken
yet complete.
A new reality replaces
what yesterday was a dream
of work and works.
The project planned
will never start.
The started project
never finished
never will be.
A wife clenches her jaws
and fills her kerchief
with sorrow and heart.
A young man regrets
the neglect he dropped
his father's way
the day before.
A daughter holds tight
her son with
her father's same
middle name.
Slice of Life

Lightning strikes a tall pine
at the southeast corner
of our property.
Sam sits at the backdoor, whining.
The horses have their heads down
and their butts into the rain.
Later, I go back into the pasture
to look for crawfish.
A hawk flies there before me
diving and going over
to a fence post to eat his prey.
I go over the stile
to see the scar on that big pine.
Amber oozes out a spiral
from the limbs to the roots.
I touch the wound and smell
the sticky sap on my finger.
I wipe it on my pants.
Sam hits the trail of a squirrel;
I head for Fountain Road.
As I reach the pipeline
I hear Sam bark like he does
when chasing hogs.
I run out in his direction, and
a piglet breaks out of the pack.
Sam takes after it.
The old sow follows; I follow her.
The piglet quits squealing
as Sam lets that sow catch him
from hind to shoulder.
I touch his wound.
It smells like blood.
Back in the pasture
two hawks work the puddles now.
coming back to collect the grasses......

This summer I gathered soft pink prairie grass in an envelope which read “last statement” in the corner, in red ink.
I had been walking down Temple Hall Highway, where my father had his last home, surrounded by a big garden and peach orchard.
The new owner had put in rental storage sheds and torn out the irises that edged the driveway, beside the tall chain-link fence and gate.
But, the peach trees went first and then the two pecan trees.
They bent and split beneath a bull-dozer. The Brazos berry vines crept into the neighbor’s lot for safety.....the wild grapes hung limp from the back tree line, where our young daughter had taken her first kiss from her first beau and they had come, flushed with purple lips from the trees, when called for supper.
A neighbor lady had saved the pink climbing rose by the screened porch …the one which had filled each entrance with sweet fragrance, just as my stepmother’s rose perfume fills my memory now of her, and of her soft white hands which rolled out crust after crust for pies my father would not eat….he was a fussy man.
Tall and strong and silver-haired until the end when he became bent and thin and the blue leaked from his eyes as he started to lose his toes to infections, but the light in his eyes remained ancient pools of water, captured in some stone, like you’d find in serious out-cropping of cedar trees.
His hands that had tossed our babies in the air now fumbled and fell on a quilt, the one I’d made for him with wools cut from his tailored dress suits he’d worn…back when everyone knew Charlie, knew the wares he sold, and loved to hear his tall tales and hear him singing in the piano bars, when he was traveling on with his job.
He did not know it then but life was changing and his sales pad was beginning to demand computer skills, to do his work quicker, better, without the expense account and the hotel bills and the songs he sang for strangers, in all the towns, when he was traveling through in his light green post-war Chevy.

Progress does that to a guy and there was no walking backward through time.
He was too old and too stubborn then to adjust his hunt ‘n peck one finger typing to fit the keyboard of a computer. And he could not amuse a cold screen with his stories, as he sold his paper wares…it was all too much.
So, my stepmother packed his tailored suits away in plastic garment bags, filling the hall closet with them. He fingered them often but finally gave me a few, too out of date to ever wear again, even if a job would open for his salesman’s skills. Those were the suits I cut to make his final quilt.

They bled in soft threads as the scraps fell from my scissors in squares.
It’s strange how little is left in the end, and of how a person is remembered....by his job....
Chrysalis emerging....

as in each thing, in almost every bit that breathes
or flies or walks or dances on a pond,
life begins as an egg, glistening, wet, held by a thread
to some mother-like something, swinging in the wind,
or laced onto a leaf, or floating in a jelly jar...all promise.

a kind mother leaves them close to something wonderful to
eat as they emerge in a larvae stage, crawling blindly,
helpless, full of soft warm stuff ... they might have many
legs, or none....left to wiggle in a skin that doesn't fit them long.

it splits and they form a shell and hang from another thread
spinning cocoons and sealing away to find the time needed,
in privacy, to reform every bit of their bodies into something else,
something beautiful, something bold, a thing with wings......

it is said by some old men and old women that butterflies
are really kisses blown by pleasant-mannered gods, who have grown
bored and who, just for the fun of it, blow multi-colored, dancing
kisses toward the summer wind, which picks them up and spins
them round until they grow thirsty and begin to drink from flowers.

now and then, but not so often as you'd think, a very special creature flies
from the hands of these gods, its wings glittering black, the sign of a poet,
sent to tell the story of this beautifully crafted metamorphosis.
witness to a death

My mother had asked the nurse for her make-up
And had drawn scarlet lips in Avon glory up to her nostrils
And near her hairline, her eyebrows were impossibly black
She had fixed herself up for a visit from her Charlie,
A man she’d left forty years ago, when the bed grew cold,
And he began to sweep the highway by their home.

It seemed so long ago to us, but hadn’t happened yet to her.
She who only hummed and never sang, now did…..
At the top of her lungs, her oxygen prongs in her nostrils
“South of the border, down Mexico way,
That’s where I fell in love when stars above came out to play
And the mission bells told me, that we’d never part
South of the border, down Mexico way”…

Her sister was embarrassed but her nurse just smiled as I joined her loudly
In her final song. At her service later, under the stand of crape myrtle trees,
And beside a father she did not remember, we gathered, and sang
Every verse to Amazing Grace and Shall We Gather at the River.
When time came, I gathered the cards from the floral displays for my aged mother
And was surprised to see that the largest one, out-shining all the rest by far,
Was a wreath of white roses and lilies with a note from Charlie that said simply
“rest in peace now”.
Clarity

Unused to depth, patience seems only reasonable, a resolve to cautious alert, perked to listen: know that placid surfaces do not so much deceive as recommend, invite, soliciting notice:

meaning, always ulterior, initiates a seethe of metaphor, swift yet unsure beckoning — even kindness seems untimely here, and unexpected: crafty innocence, a smile rippling across the face unasked for, yet dense with promise: a white slivered moon in an otherwise blue and empty sky, itself cool pledge, heralds unexpected and unrehearsed nostalgia, recondite reminder of other afternoons unhurried by such clarity.
How Shall I Love You?

You may (did) ask, how shall I love you
Now that you’ve been done in,
Below the soul, sick as sorrow, plunged deep as dark
Into that pit so casually talked about as cancer?

Breast and pancreas, lung and ovary, maybe even blood,
Caught close, clutched like a rag doll some fussy puppy
Snaps between its teeth, jaws ripping, witless as wayward.

How shall I love you, you may (did) ask,
When snared by some errant hormone
Obstinate as prayer, unwilled and wanton?

How, and I say: why, just like always, but all the more,
Now, now that you’ve been bowed, yet unbent,
At just this time, in just this way, plagued by whispers of
More, more of that wicked presence, even though
All that you are and ever have been is still so intact,
All essential things untouched, and all that’s important
Still unentangled by it, as harsh as it was accidental,
Perverse as only chance can be.
In the Moment

For June and “Skiing in Alaska”

As she is inclined so often,
She wonders what in the world
I could be doing, sitting in that soft
Chair and watching, on the television,
Wally the cat on my lap, iced tea beside me,
As people, mostly men but some women too,
Ski wildly down impossible slopes and precipices,
Going off into the empty air, doing equally impossible
Somersaults and flips and twists, skis tumbling and over,
Each one also plummeting out into hollow air as they, eyes open
And fixed like solemn eagles on it’s never clear what,
Just open and gazing as they spill out into that great empty
A mere moment away from an easy flip into sobering injury, or death.

What, more than that, why was I watching,
Intent on these acrobats on skis slip-sliding
Into the void, out, out, over and then falling with
Astonishing grace into banks of snow below as if placed
And waiting for precisely those poised, nimble, elegant plunges,
Then off and out, an also beautiful flow of skis reaching down, down
Until, finally, coming to a stop, finesse and dignity in a moment unlike
Any other: done and gone, down now onto the snow-cushion of solid earth.

Clearly, I could only be said to have been mesmerized,
Stunned into the silent and grateful recognition I
Had also been aiming for, not the fall nor
The leap, dazzling as these always are
But for that moment when it all
Just stops, lapping into its own
Lovely acknowledgment.
A three-day celebration of some of the finest contemporary poets, with readings, a panel discussion, and the Virginia Beall Ball Lecture on Contemporary Poetry.

Susan Wheeler, Simon Armitage, Terrance Hayes, Neil Corcoran

Wednesday, March 25, 3:30 PM (Carroll Science 101): Student Literary Awards

Wednesday, March 25, 7:00 PM: Terrance Hayes Poetry Reading

Thursday, March 26, 3:30 PM: Neil Corcoran, "Robert Graves and Contemporary Poetry"

Thursday, March 26, 7:00 PM: Susan Wheeler Poetry Reading

Friday, March 27, 3:30 PM: Panel Discussion (Carroll Science 101)

Friday, March 27, 7:00 PM: Simon Armitage Poetry Reading

All events in Bennett Auditorium unless otherwise signified.

Baylor University's 21st annual Beall Poetry Festival is supported by the John A. and DeLouise McClelland Beall Endowed Fund, established in 1994 by Mrs. Virginia B. Ball of Muncie, Ind., to honor her parents and to encourage the writing and appreciation of poetry. For more information, write to the Baylor University Department of English at One Bear Place #97404, Waco, TX 76798-7404 or call (254) 710-1768.